United Nations E/2002/SR.15

Economic and Social Council

Provisional
11 October 2002

Original: English

Substantive session for 2002
Operational activities segment

Provisional summary record of the 15th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 8 July 2002, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Kumalo (Vice-President) ..... (South Africa)

Contents

Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation (*continued*)

(a) Progress report on the implementation of the triennial comprehensive policy review (*continued*)

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of this document* to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

02-46586 (E)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kumalo (South Africa), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation (*continued*)

(a) Progress report on the implementation of the triennial comprehensive policy review (*continued*) (E/2002/47 and Add.1 and 2, 58, 59 and 60; E/2002/CRP.1)

1. **Mr. Thoppil** (Observer for Canada) said that his delegation appreciated the efforts made to respond quickly and effectively to General Assembly resolution 56/201, on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development. The revised guidelines for the common country assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) were welcome, as were the guidance notes on the monitoring of the Millennium development goals and the support to the poverty reduction strategy paper process. The United Nations system must also help the developing countries meet the commitments they had undertaken in the Monterrey Consensus to pursue good governance and sound economic policies in order to create an enabling environment for the mobilization of domestic resources, foreign direct investment, trade and effective use of debt relief and other international assistance. His delegation also commended the efforts to strengthen the resident coordinator system through an improved selection process and the identification of more women candidates.

2. His delegation remained concerned at the difficulties encountered in mainstreaming the gender perspective in operational activities and hoped that measures would be taken to address the situation. It welcomed the emphasis on simplification and harmonization of rules and procedures for operational activities and supported the proposal to reconsider the content of the consolidated list of issues requested by the Council in its resolution 98/27.

3. **Mr. Zollinger** (Observer for Switzerland) said that the progress achieved in the United Nations reform process to date was remarkable, given the size and diversity of the Organization's operational activities, but more must be done to improve efficiency in an increasingly competitive environment. CCAs and UNDAFs remained key instruments of the reform process and should lead to joint and collaborative programming arrangements. Some progress had been made with regard to the "replacement effect" mentioned in document E/2002/59 (para. 16), and there was potential for much more.

4. With regard to simplification and harmonization, his delegation was pleased with the programme of work submitted by the funds and programmes. Switzerland had been an observer in a competency assessment exercise for resident coordinators, which, although costly, had been money well spent, as the qualifications of resident coordinators were of the utmost importance for the reputation and success of operational activities at the country level.

5. Capacity-building was a key function of the United Nations system that must be addressed through clear objectives and indicators in all CCAs and UNDAFs. It was also important to identify the results obtained and communicate them clearly; his delegation had therefore been disappointed that the report on United Nations system support for capacity-building (E/2002/58) had placed more emphasis on efforts than on results achieved. Moreover, the report on assessing the effectiveness of operational activities (E/2002/60) did not fully convince his delegation that the approach for the next assessment would be strengthened, and it disagreed with the views expressed on the use of results-based management.

6. Turning to the topic of funding, he noted that while resources for the World Bank and other institutions had been augmented, core contributions to United Nations funds and programmes had increased only marginally or even decreased. The United Nations should focus on policy development and capacity-building and leave the financing of programmes with major equipment and infrastructure components to the international financing institutions. The Economic and Social Council should be entrusted with the task of conducting regular reviews of development cooperation in general and of trends in bilateral as well as multilateral aid.

7. **Ms. Oh** Hyun-joo (Republic of Korea) welcomed the progress made in field-level coordination of operational activities, including the resident coordinator system and the United Nations house programme. In that connection, it was important that the relationship between the United Nations development agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions should be enhanced.

8. Her delegation saw simplification and harmonization as the keys to reform of operational activities and hoped to see further progress through common utilization of the CCA and the UNDAF. Joint programming and greater utilization of information and communications technologies (ICT) should also be encouraged.

9. As a key component of any development strategy, capacity-building was closely linked to national ownership and accountability. It was therefore crucial to involve countries in the entire process, from formulation to implementation to monitoring, since learning by doing promoted capacity-building.

10. Her delegation was concerned at the downward trend in core resources, which were the bedrock of development activities. As many Governments preferred to make earmarked contributions, the expansion of thematic trust funds might help to increase contributions by accommodating donor concerns without taking away from core resources. Technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC), particularly in the field of ICT, also had a major role to play.

11. **Mr. Kulyk** (Ukraine) said that despite the progress achieved in some spheres of development cooperation, one of the main challenges — the problem of mobilizing core resources — remained unsettled. There had been some positive developments in stabilizing the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) financially, but further steps were needed to ensure predictable and long-term resources for development. The results of the recent International Conference on Financing for Development should provide new impetus for further substantial increases in official development assistance (ODA).

12. His Government commended the work of the United Nations office in Kiev and believed that UNDP should continue to play the key role in coordinating the activities of all United Nations agencies in Ukraine, especially long-term projects such as the Chernobyl programme and the Crimea Integration and Development Programme. He welcomed the increasing involvement of United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies in activities to mitigate the long-term consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

13. **Ms. Thomas** (Observer for Jamaica) said that the recent Monterrey Conference had highlighted the urgent need to mobilize new and additional resources for development, through both ODA and a more equitable distribution of foreign direct investment. Her delegation hoped that the commitments made in Monterrey would be translated into tangible gains for developing countries.

14. Despite reduced funding, the United Nations had made commendable efforts at the field level to synchronize its programming cycle and harmonize and simplify its rules of procedure. The impact of those reforms at the country level, particularly the CCA and the UNDAF, augured well for building partnerships and should pave the way for South-South cooperation, which allowed developing countries to share best practices and lessons learned. In that context, Jamaica fully supported efforts to mainstream a gender perspective in all United Nations programmes.

15. Capacity-building was central to sustainable development and must be addressed in a holistic, integrated fashion. It was a major component of all efforts to achieve the goals of poverty eradication, economic growth and sustainable development. The renewed focus on a bottom-up approach made it imperative to develop the requisite skills and expertise locally, which was why Jamaica believed that more attention should be directed towards capacity-building within the community of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which were often involved with national development concerns at the grass-roots level. Her delegation also supported the UNDP Capacity 2015 initiative to address local capacity development needs and promote public and private sector partnerships at all levels.

16. The Jamaican Government had sought to make capacity-building a priority in its overall policy framework, especially in the areas of education, health and information technology. Partnerships between the public and private sectors in the areas of early childhood education and prevention of HIV/AIDS had been encouraged, as Jamaica firmly believed that a country's health and education status was a good indicator of its capacity for growth and sustainable development. In the area of information technology, emphasis had been placed on creating a knowledge-based society to meet the challenges of globalization. Information played a major role in national development, including Government accountability, transparency and public participation in decision-making.

17. Her delegation remained concerned about the asymmetrical relationship between donors and recipient countries. The goal of equal partnerships was

still distant, owing to the incompatibility of donor priorities with national development goals. National ownership of the development process could be achieved only if donors allowed recipient Governments to set the agenda for their own development.

18. **Mr. Djumala** (Observer for Indonesia) commended the progress made in reforming United Nations development activities but said that further revisions to the CCA and UNDAF guidelines were needed to improve coordination within the United Nations system. The Millennium development goals had also provided more opportunities for convergence between the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations system, but there should be fewer ad hoc consultations and a more institutionalized form of dialogue should be developed, in keeping with the spirit of the Monterrey Consensus.

19. Capacity-building, which was fundamental for development, should take place within the framework of national development plans and should be integrated with the resident coordinator system. The objective of sustainable development was to help national institutions develop the means to promote development and economic growth with little outside assistance. It should also be borne in mind that the sovereignty of Member States should not be infringed, nor should the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States be violated in pursuit of development.

20. His Government wished to reaffirm its support for the ongoing efforts to ensure that core resources for operational activities were available on a predictable, continuous and assured basis, since such resources helped to preserve the multilateral character of the United Nations system. The increase in foreign aid announced by leaders of donor countries at the Monterrey Conference and the recent agreement by the World Bank to extend more grants to low-income countries were encouraging signs that developing countries could count on the cooperation, support and solidarity of the international community. The current challenge, of course, was to transform that spirit into will and words into action.

21. **Mr. Dorji** (Bhutan) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and reaffirmed *that operational activities should reflect the policies* and priorities of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, in a flexible manner. The CCA and the UNDAF had fostered greater national ownership and participation as well as greater coordination, and he endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendation to further strengthen those mechanisms.

22. The decline in ODA, which had affected the operational activities of the United Nations system in many countries, was disturbing. Recent increases in funding for organizations such as UNDP, while welcome, fell severely short of the level required to meet internationally agreed development goals. Accordingly, he welcomed the commitments made at Monterrey to provide increased funding and urged the international community to channel part of that increase to the core resources of United Nations funds and programmes for operational activities.

23. He noted with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General on support for capacity-building (E/2002/58) and said that the efforts undertaken by the United Nations system in that area were encouraging. Capacity-building was critical, as it encompassed a myriad of interdependent issues, ranging from institutional and human resource capacity to infrastructure and private-sector development. Strategies developed must therefore have social, economic and political dimensions as well as deal with all aspects of capacity-building.

24. In his next report to the operational activities segment, the Secretary-General should give special consideration to the progress made in mobilizing adequate resources for development.

25. **Mr. Akinsanya** (Nigeria) recalled that General Assembly resolution 56/201 accepted the principle of country ownership, leadership and responsibility. The reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of that resolution had identified four key roles for United Nations operational activities: helping developing countries achieve their development goals by integrating international development goals and targets into national priorities and strategies; capacity-building, to help developing countries meet the goals of the Millennium Declaration; stressing ownership by recipient countries of development cooperation efforts; and making the development efforts of the United Nations system more coherent, coordinated, efficient and effective.

26. The combination of the global economic slowdown, which had caused a steady decline in core resources for operational development activities, and donor countries' reluctance to provide additional

resources posed a serious challenge to efforts to achieve the Millennium development goals. Private non-core resources were no substitute for core resources, yet ODA levels were not commensurate with the developing countries' increased ability to use external aid effectively and efficiently. To succeed, the Monterrey Consensus would require the allocation of adequate resource, and he therefore welcomed the strong new political commitment to help developing countries achieve sustainable development and noted with appreciation the appeal for additional core resources for development activities.

27. Although a year was too short a time for a comprehensive review of progress, his delegation supported that review and other similar processes. However, there should be greater consultation and coordination between donors and the United Nations system on the one hand and field officers and national Governments on the other. The United Nations system should speedily address the issue of transaction costs, particularly in the areas of consultancy and environmental impact assessment fees.

28. General Assembly resolution 56/201 was clear on the need to train nationals of recipient countries and make them part of the development infrastructure. Experience in the field continued to reveal wide gaps between the cost of providing services and the real benefits of those services. Although the introduction of strategic instruments such as the CCA and the UNDAF had been a positive step, the United Nations Development Group should endeavour to coordinate those two instruments more effectively at the country level.

29. He welcomed the progress made in promoting a simplification and harmonization of procedures and in strengthening the resident coordinator system, in particular with regard to gender sensitivity, an area in which his Government had demonstrated its commitment by mainstreaming the gender perspective into national socio-economic planning and development. His Government remained committed to efforts to implement General Assembly resolution 56/201 more effectively.

30. **Mr. Valdés** (Chile) said he wished to associate himself with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Economic and Social Council had an important role to play in implementing the Millennium Declaration and the Monterrey Consensus; the former provided worthwhile guidelines for the work of the Council and the General Assembly while the latter constituted a first step towards dealing with the issues of development and the inequalities created by globalization. The programme of work of the World Summit on Sustainable Development should also contribute to United Nations efforts in the area of economic and social development.

31. Multilateral development aid was more important than ever and must be better managed and more focused, given the positive effect it had on the lives of millions. Accordingly, donor countries must strive to meet the Millennium development goals, and efforts must continue to be made to ensure that cooperation resources truly benefited the least developed countries.

32. Continued support must also be provided for programmes in middle-income countries which targeted the most vulnerable groups of society and sought to increase popular participation in policy-making and consolidate and expand human rights and democracy. In Latin America, for example, UNDP was promoting the development of public policies aimed at improving the lot of society's most vulnerable groups in a focused manner while obtaining optimum benefit from technical cooperation and assistance. The UNDP human development report had been a useful tool in that regard.

33. Multilateral cooperation programmes provided a foundation for progress and growth. Nevertheless, they could not replace individual societies' efforts to increase savings, strengthen their economies, consolidate the rule of law or develop participatory and democratic policies which made social development a collective enterprise.

34. **Mr. Ahmad** (Observer for Iraq) expressed appreciation for the reports of the Secretary-General and for the development efforts of the United Nations, particularly in the face of a global economic slowdown. However, he deplored the ongoing economic embargo against his country, which had greatly hindered development efforts there and had affected all segments of society, especially children, who constituted more than 43 per cent of the population. For example, the under-five mortality rate had increased and more than 1 million children had died in the 11 years since the beginning of the embargo. Children's health and education had been affected, and increasing numbers of children were forced to drop out of school because they could not afford schooling or had to work to help their families. Too little attention

had been paid to the suffering of the children of Iraq, and he wondered how such a situation could be tolerated at a time when the United Nations was stressing the protection of children and the promotion of human rights.

35. **Ms. Loemban Tobing-Klein** (Suriname) associated herself with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and stressed the importance of United Nations development goals. Her Government continued to work in close cooperation with the United Nations country team, civil society and NGO representatives and other stakeholders within the framework of the UNDAF process. A poverty reduction strategy programme, an environmental management and sustainable development programme and an HIV/AIDS strategy had been prepared for Suriname. The UNDAF was being developed in stages with the CCA, both of which were important operational tools for development partners.

36. The UNDAF, CCA and capacity-building efforts would play a key role in helping countries like Suriname prepare national Millennium development goal reports. Her delegation attached great importance to implementation of those goals and targets by 2015 but believed that strong support was needed from donors and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which were preparing indicators in close cooperation with the United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

37. She drew attention to several issues that her delegation considered to be a priority. Capacity-building must draw on available national expertise, with special attention paid to the brain-drain problem in the Caribbean. Donors must be encouraged to support the retention of trained personnel in their home countries rather than recruiting them to the developed world. Information and communication technologies must be mainstreamed into the development process, and her Government looked forward to taking advantage of international opportunities in that area. The education of boys and the reduction of their high dropout rates should be made a priority in the Caribbean region. Human rights should be viewed as an essential element of sustainable development and, lastly, ODA should be doubled to ensure implementation of the Monterrey Consensus.

38. **Mr. Sharma** (Nepal) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Operational activities were a fundamental aspect of the Council's work; through the triennial comprehensive policy review the Council guided United Nations development efforts and played a role in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of international conferences such as the Millennium Summit and the Monterrey Conference.

39. Although capacity-building had been identified as critical for development, the steep decline in core resources had seriously crippled the Organization's ability to help needy nations. He therefore urged all Member States, especially the wealthy States, to increase their contributions to core resources. The rules and procedures for operational activities for development must be simplified and harmonized in order to avoid duplication, improve coherence and cooperation and achieve economies of scale. The CCA and the UNDAF would be helpful in achieving those goals. However, harmonization and simplification, while necessary, should not be implemented at the cost of undermining programme delivery, efficiency or effectiveness.

40. Resident coordinators played a key role in ensuring the effectiveness of operational activities, and he welcomed efforts to improve field-level coordination. Resident coordinators should also be given more authority to tailor programmes to local situations in order to improve development performance, and regional and gender balance should be ensured in the appointment of resident coordinators.

41. In the context of South-South cooperation, he expressed support for TCDC and urged that that initiative should be expanded. Increased cooperation among the countries of the South would send a strong message to development partners in the North that they needed to do more.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.